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ABSTRACT

The affective experiences of empathy, shame, and guilt have been identified as those most relevant to the development of moral motivation and moral behavior. It has been postulated that these cognitive/affective experiences serve to motivate moral and altruistic social behavior, while inhibiting the expression of aggressive, antisocial impulses. These studies examined the relationships of empathic responsiveness, shame, and proneness to guilt. Study 1 included 100 undergraduates, the majority from a west-coast university; study 2 included 98 undergraduates, the majority from an east coast university. Subjects completed the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory and the Feshbach and Lipian Empathy Scale for Adults. Results showed proneness to shame was generally negatively correlated with empathy in both studies. In contrast there was a moderate positive relationship between proneness to guilt and empathy in Study 1, and a negligible relationship between guilt and empathy in Study 2. The general pattern of results was quite similar across male and female subsamples. These results add a new dimension to the ugliness of shame, and they suggest that guilt may not be that bad after all, at least in the interpersonal domain. The ultimate test of the apparent dynamics among shame, guilt, and empthy, however, will be in studies of people's actual behavior--comparisons of the interpersonal behavior in real life situations of shame-prone and guilt-prone persons. (ABL)

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Summary

Proneness to Shame, Proneness to Guilt, and Empathic Responsiveness

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Summary

Proneness to Shame, Proneness to Guilt, and Empathic Responsiveness

The affective experiences of empathy, shame, and guilt have been identified as those most relevant to the development of moral motivation and moral behavior. It has been postulated that these cognitive/affective experiences serve to motivate moral and altruistic social behavior, while inhibiting the expression of aggressive, antisocial impulses (Hoffman, 1982a, 1982b).

Martin Hoffman (1982b) has argued that there is an important link between guilt and empathic distress. True interpersonal guilt (i.e., feeling badly when one is aware of doing someone harm) hinges on: (1) an empathic awareness and response to someone's distress, and (2) an awareness of being the cause of that distress. From this perspective, empathy is an essential prerequisite for guilt, at least in earlier developmental stages.

Although the feeling of guilt is often accompanied by a desire to make amends (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984), the empathic arousal/guilt sequence does not always result in helping behavior or reparative action. Hoffman believes that there may be an optimal range of empathic arousal within which people are most responsive to others. When aroused beyond this range, people may become too preoccupied with their own aversive state to help others.

The critical question for longterm interpersonal behavior, however, may not be the degree of initial empathic arousal, but rather the subsequent implications of that arousal. Hoffman does not make a clear distinction between shame and guilt. In fact, his descriptions of guilt overlap somewhat with theoretical and phenomenologically-derived definitions of shame (Lewis, 1971; Lindsay-Hartz, 1984). Guilt is an affective state most often associated with a focus on some past behavior inconsistent with internalized standards. It is an uncomfortable, but not debilitating experience in which the self-concept remains essentially intact. Shame is a much more painful and devastating experience which involves less of a focus on specific behaviors and more focus on the entire self. In the shame experience, the it is the self, not just the behavior, which is painfully scrutinized and negatively evaluated.

The empathic awareness of another person's distress, and the awareness that one caused that distress, can lead to a number of different responses, depending on the individual — that is, depending on whether the individual is more prone to shame or guilt. One can respond with guilt: "Look at this horrible thing I've <u>done</u>". Or one can response with shame: "Look at the horrible person I <u>am</u>."

There are suggestions in the phenomenological literature (e.g., Lindsay-Hartz, 1984) that shame is so painful, it overwhelms us so that we feel more like hiding than capable of repairing. A key hypothesis in the current study is that empathic responsiveness will be inversely related to a tendency to experience shame. The ugly feeling of shame often has its roots in empathy with the other. That is, in order to feel shame in such instances ("Look at the horrible person I <u>am</u>" for having caused such harm), some minimal degree of empathy is initially necessary to recognize the distress of the other. However, the acute self-focus of shame may preclude a continued empathic connection. In

addition, because the consequent feeling of shame is so aversive, it may motivate us to be less empathic in future interactions.

Guilt is uncomfortable enough to motivate us to repair, to undo or to make amends. But it is not aversive enough to preclude positive action, nor is it aversive enough to squelch our empathic tendencies. Thus, a secondary hypothesis to be tested in the current study is that empathy and proneness to guilt are positively associated, as Hoffman suggests -- or at the very least, that these individual difference factors will show a negligible relationship.

Method

Participants in Study 1 were 100 undergraduates attending one of two state universities, the majority from a large west-coast university. 86% received credit toward an undergraduate course requirement. 64% were female. 65.3% were white, 6.9% black, 23.8% asian, and 4% other. 25.7% reported their primary religious affiliation in childhood as Catholic, 22.8% Protestant, 31.7% Jewish, 5% eastern faiths, and 13.9% no affiliation.

Participants in Study 2 were 98 undergraduates attending a large east-coast state university. Participants received credit toward an undergraduate course requirement. 73.5% were female. 75.5% were white, 11.2% black, 10.2% asian, and 3.1% other. 35.7% reported their primary religious affiliation in childhood as Catholic, 21.4% Protestant, 24.5% Jewish, 4.1% eastern faiths, and 11.2% no affiliation.

Students completed the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory (SCAAI), a paper-and-pencil measure developed by the current investigator which consists of 13 brief scenarios, some positive and some negative in valence. The ten negatively valenced scenarios are followed, in random order, by responses indicating Shame, Guilt, Externalization, and Detachment/unconcern. Three positively valenced scenarios are followed by responses indicating Shame, Guilt, Externalization, "Alpha Pride" (pride in self), and "Beta Pride" (pride in behavior). Subjects rate, on a 5-point scale, their likelihood of responding in each of the manners indicated. In previous reports, we have presented data supporting the reliability and construct validity of the central scales of the SCAAI (Tangney, 1988; Tangney, Burggraf, Hamme & Domingos, 1988).

Subjects also completed the Feshbach and Lipian (1987) Empathy Scale for Adults, a paper-and-pencil measure which yields a Total Empathy index and four empathy subscales: General Empathy, Cognitive Empathy (e.g., role taking, perspective taking), Emotional Empathy (the ability to experience a range of affect), and Affective Cue Discrimination (see Feshbach [1987] for a discussion of the cognitive and affective components of empathy).

Results and Discussion

As anticipated, proneness to shame was generally negatively correlated with empathy in both studies (Table 1). In contrast, there was a moderate positive relationship between proneness to guilt and empathy in Study 1, and a negligible relationship between guilt and empathy in Study 2. This pattern of results is very striking when one considers that the SCAAI shame and guilt subscales are themselves positively correlated about .48 (Tangney, 1988; Tangney, et al.,

1988). But in spite of this covariation between the shame and guilt subscales, quite distinct patterns were obtained in their relationship to empathy. Secondary analyses revealed that these correlations are not an artifact of gender differences in the variables of interest. The general pattern of results was quite similar across male and female subsamples.

Externalization of cause or blame was modestly negatively related to empathy, while detachment/unconcern and both types of pride were essentially orthogonal to empathic responsiveness.

In this examination of the interrelationship among moral affective characteristics, it is the unique portion of the variance in shame and guilt, respectively, that is of special interest. To further refine our analyses, part correlations were conducted, factoring out shame from guilt and vice versa. The part correlational results were even more striking (see Table 2). Shame residuals were very negatively correlated with empathy in both studies; guilt residuals were positively associated with empathy, particularly in Study 2.

It is interesting to note the empathy scales for which these results were strongest. The cognitively-oriented empathy scales, not the emotional empathy subscale, showed this striking set of relationships to shame and guilt. Such a pattern of results is consistent with the notion that motivational factors come to bear on the interrelationship among empathy, shame and guilt. One might expect the cognitive components of empathy (perspective taking, affective cue discrimination) to be more subject to motivational effects, simply because they are more subject to conscious control. We may not have much choice over whether we experience a kind of emotional contagion when faced with a distressed other. But we can, to some degree, choose whether we will take that person's perspective.

These results add a new dimension to the ugliness of shame, and they suggest that guilt may not be that bad after all, at least in the interpersonal domain. The ultimate test of the apparent dynamics among shame, guilt, and empathy, however, will be in studies of people's actual behavior — comparisons of the interpersonal behavior in real life situations of shame-prone and guilt-prone persons.

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Table 1

Correlations of SCAAI Subscales with the Feshbach Empathy Scale

in Two Independent Studies

	Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory					
	Shame	Guilt	External.	Detached	A. Pride	B. Pride
Feshbach Empathy						
General Empathy	.06	.39***	-.06	-.09	-.05	-.03
	.08	.13	.02	-.01	.03	.20+
Cognitive Empathy	-.26**	.21*	-.22*	-.08	.13	-.04
	-.27**	.07	-.19+	-.10	.17+	.20+
Emotional Empathy	-.11	.03	-.11	-.04	.19+	-.03
	-.22*	-.05	-.05	.13	.07	.12
Affective Cue Discrimination	-.36***	.00	-.20+	.02	.06	-.12
	-.34***	-.14	-.11	.16	.17+	.19+
Total Empathy	-.20+	.22*	-.17+	-.07	.10	-.06
	-.25*	.01	-.11	.12	.14	.24*

Note: Study 2 correlations appear below Study 1 correlations. Study 1 Ns range from 98-100. Study 2 Ns range from 96-97. $p<.10$+ $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$***

Table 2

Part Correlations of the Feshbach Empathy Scale with

SCAAI Shame and Guilt Residuals in Two Independent Studies

	SCAAI Shame Residuals	SCAAI Guilt Residuals
Feshbach Empathy		
General Empathy	-.14 .02	.41*** .10
Cognitive Empathy	-.41*** -.35***	.38*** .23*
Emotional Empathy	-.14 -.23*	.09 .07
Affective Cue Discrimination	-.42*** -.31**	.21* .03
Total Empathy	-.34*** -.29**	.36*** .15

Note: Study 2 correlations appear below Study 1 correlations. Study 1 Ns range from 98-99. Study 2 N=97. $p<.05$* $p<.01$** $p<.001$***